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"Prayer for Victory" as a Symptom of the Degradation of the ROC

Russian Orthodox Church Moscow Patriarchate

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September 25, 2022, Patriarch Kirill (Vladimir Gundyaev) introduced a new prayer for mandatory daily reading in all churches of the Russian Orthodox Church — "Prayer for Holy Rus'" [1]. This text, which quickly gained the unofficial name "prayer for victory," became not a unifying spiritual act but rather a catalyst for deep division and an object of criticism. Why did a prayer intended to strengthen the Orthodox flock turn into an apple of discord and a marker of disloyalty?

An analysis of the text of the prayer, the context of its emergence, and the consequences of its noncompliance reveals three interrelated destructive processes that have afflicted the modern Russian Orthodox Church:

1. **Theological retreat** from fundamental Gospel principles.
2. The final **merger of the church apparatus with the state ideological machine.**

The manifestation of characteristics typical of **authoritarian corporate mafia systems** within the structure of the ROC (MP) [2].

Anatomy of the "Prayer for Holy Rus'" or the "Prayer for Victory"

At first glance the text, composed in a traditional Church Slavonic style, looks like a typical religious petition to God. There are thousands, if not tens of thousands, of such petitionary prayers in contemporary Orthodox Christianity — from "get married" to "relief from toothache." But on closer inspection this text proves not to be a liturgical composition but a genuine ideological manifesto.

We propose to examine the key formulations and their meaning.

For example:

"...for those wishing to wage war have mustered against Holy Rus', seeking to divide and destroy her single people."

This phrase represents a concentrated quintessence of Kremlin propaganda translated into the language of church petitions. It embeds several key narratives.

What we see here is a blatant substitution of concepts. A clearly defined military conflict, in which Russia — as the aggressor — initiated the war, is twisted by the clergy and presented as an attack by some external forces on the mythical "Holy Rus'." Incidentally, this concept refers back to the historical

period of the emergence of Christianity in Kyivan Rus' ten centuries ago, when neither modern-day Russia nor Ukraine existed.

Patriarch Kirill (Vladimir Gundyaev)

When today the "Russian World" is linked to the historical "Holy Rus'" — and it is precisely the "Russian World" that serves as the key idea of modern Russian propaganda — it completely distorts history. Kyivan Rus never contradicted the existence or development of an independent Ukraine. Yet, such a misinterpretation effectively denies Ukrainian sovereignty, its history, and its right to self-determination, reducing the country to the role of a "separated fragment" of the so-called Russian World.

Moreover, at the core of this manipulation lies the implantation of the concept of "civilizational superiority" into the collective consciousness of Russians, assigning them the status of a "chosen people." This practice of cultivating xenophobic superiority is a classic element of Nazi ideology.

The next example in the text:

"Arise, O God, to aid Thy people, and grant us victory by Thy power."

This is the central point that provoked the greatest controversy. The prayer was introduced in place of the previous petitions for peace and well-being, and this was a significant act.

Six months after Russia's military invasion of Ukraine began, there was a deliberate substitution of the Christian ideal of **peace** with the militaristic notion of **victory** — a shift that completely changed the spiritual focus of believers from reconciliation to escalation.

Theological Bankruptcy: From the Gospel to a "Holy War"

The introduction of the "Prayer for Victory" exposed a deep rupture between the official stance of the Patriarchate and the core principles of Christian doctrine.

Contradiction to the Spirit of the New Testament

A direct call for military victory is incompatible with Christ's Sermon on the Mount: "Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God." (Matthew 5:9). In essence, the prayer becomes a petition for success in killing, which directly violates the commandment "Thou shalt not kill."

An explicit call for military victory is not only incompatible with the Sermon on the Mount but also creates a profound theological rupture, undermining the very foundations of Christian teaching. The development of this idea can be outlined through several key aspects.

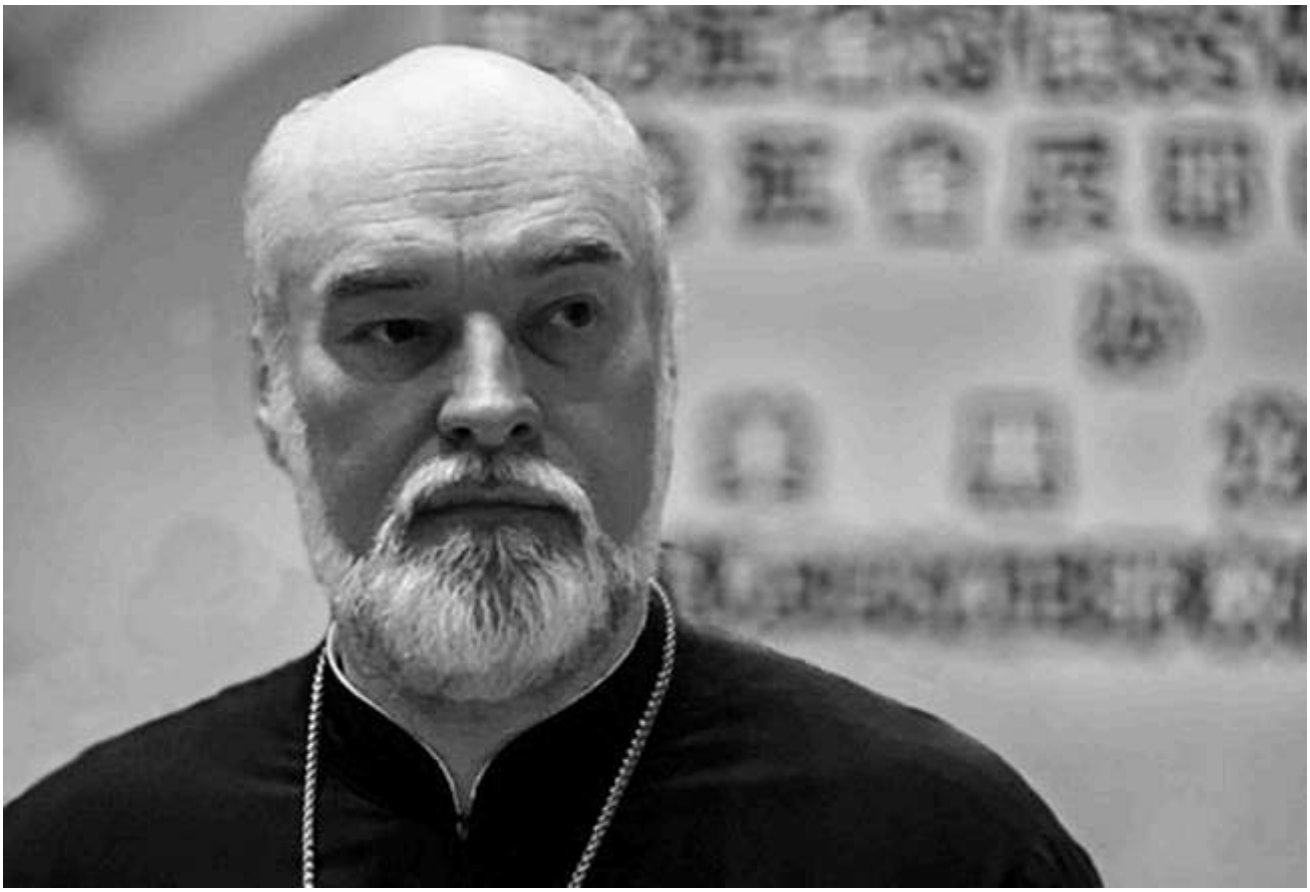
1. Contradiction to the very essence of the Beatitudes. The Sermon on the Mount is a manifesto of the new, messianic kingdom, where worldly values are overturned. Christ proclaims as blessed not the strong or the victorious, but the meek, the merciful, and the peacemakers. A prayer for military victory, in essence, asks God to grant success in violence against those He Himself commanded to love as one's neighbors (including enemies, Matthew 5:44). It is

a request for God to side with one part of humanity against another, denying the universal nature of His love.

In this context, one recalls "The IMPACT" documentary — "THE UKRAINE CASE." In 2014, the website of the Missionary Department of the Novosibirsk Diocese (headed by Alexander Novopashin, vice president of RACIRS) published an article containing the following statements:

"I just want to draw attention to one charming circumstance. Namely, the principle of Ukrainian-like state organization... almost completely coincides with the principle of organizing a totalitarian sect, or destructive cult.

...Meanwhile, for people who found themselves in a cult and once swallowed the cultist lie, this lie becomes a norm. Cultists not only lie to themselves and others, but they also stop perceiving any opinion different from the one imposed on them by the cult. Therefore, simply talking, persuading, or proving – is a useless and thankless task... We must remember that the war in Ukraine isn't for territories, the war is for souls, and it will continue in one form or another until activities of the Cult are stopped..."



Yevgeny Nikiforov, director of the Orthodox radio station “Radonezh,” who popularized the activities of Dvorkin and Novopashin, stated the following:

“*In Ukraine, the disease is so advanced that it’s no longer possible to cure it with any persuasion, negotiations, or anything like that. Only surgery is possible there. So the only response to those Nazi speeches may be the Solntsepek weapon. It should all be burned down, absolutely… Someone may tell me, ‘Oh, that’s not a Christian way!’ It is quite Christian. It’s just the ethics for those people; they position themselves as pagans, excuse me, so let them get what pagans should. Not the New Testament ethics is applicable there, but the Old Testament ethics, that of Elijah the Prophet who himself cut the throats of three hundred servants of Balaam. With these ones, we should do the same — destroy them without any doubt. Just the Old Testament ethics, and they actually understand this language only.*”

Evgeny Nikiforov, Director of the Orthodox Radio Radonezh

One more quote from “The IMPACT” documentary:
The final chord, which indicates the ultimate goal of a number of such rhetoric, is the statement of another RACIRS leader, Archpriest Alexander Novopashin, who called Ukrainians cannibals:

“For me, they are all cannibals… I called them so because I saw them like that. These inhumans spill human blood, the blood of children and women, our blood; they devour people’s lives and feed on suffering. So who are they? Cannibals. And all those who committed terrorist attacks on our land, whom I listed earlier and whom I didn’t name, are cannibals. It is useless to put cannibals in a cage. They’ll still remain cannibals, even if you keep them there all their lives. Therefore, cannibals must be destroyed.”

2. Perverting the nature of prayer. In the Christian tradition, prayer is not a magical ritual meant to achieve earthly goals but a means of uniting the human personality with the divine nature of the soul. Recall the petition “Thy will be done” — central to the Lord’s Prayer. A prayer for victory in battle substitutes that purpose, turning into a tool for sanctifying one’s own, often political, ambitions. It ceases to be a plea for peace and the repentance of warring parties and becomes a request for successful killing, which is a blasphemous distortion of the prayerful dialogue.

3. Conflict with the commandment “Thou shalt not kill” and the teaching on love. The commandment “Thou shalt not kill” (Exodus 20:13) receives a radical deepening in Christ: even anger toward a brother is already equated with murder (Matthew 5:21–22). A prayer for military victory not only circumvents this commandment but seeks divine sanction for killing, attempting to make God an accomplice in the breach of His own fundamental law. This directly contradicts the greatest commandment — to love God and one’s neighbor, where “neighbor” means every human being, including an enemy (as in the parable of the Good Samaritan).

4. Substitution of Christian identity. When believers pray for military victory, they unwittingly exchange their identity as “children of God” (as peacemakers are called) for the identity of “children of their earthly homeland,” whose interests are placed above the covenants of Christ. Their faith risks turning into a civic religion, where the cross serves as a justification for the sword, and the Gospel is replaced with national mythology.

Thus, the “Prayer for Victory” is not merely a private deviation, but a contradiction that places national or state interests above the Gospel commandments; transforms God from the loving Father of all people into a national god-warrior, and finally, legitimizes the violence that Christ came to overcome.

This approach reverts consciousness to the Old Testament, pre-Christian paradigm, denying the radical newness of the New Testament.

Nationalization of Faith

Returning to the analysis of the text of the “Prayer for Holy Rus’,” one inevitably comes to understand that the universal and supranational Kingdom of Heaven is replaced in it by a specific geopolitical project — the “Russian World.” The plea for glory through victory over the enemy carries echoes of a pagan, tribal worldview, where a deity acts as the protector of one people in its struggle against another.

This tendency reached its peak in March 2024, when, at the World Russian People’s Council (WRPC), chaired by Patriarch Kirill-Gundyaev, the war in Ukraine was officially declared “holy” [3, 4, 5]. This concept was previously alien to Orthodox theology, but it has now become convenient for state propaganda.

Non-canonicity as a Method

Critics note that the “Prayer for Holy Rus’” was never approved by the Holy Synod and is absent from official liturgical books [the Euchologion and the Liturgy Book]. Experts believe the patriarch’s order requiring its mandatory recitation exceeds his authority and violates the charter of ROC. This demonstrates that, for today’s church leadership, political expediency outweighs canonical law.

The ROC (MP) as an Ideology Department

The “Prayer for Victory” has become a marker of the final stage in the merger of the ROC (MP) with the state, where the church has turned from a spiritual institution into a “religious branch of power,” as many analysts observe.

However, the situation is not entirely straightforward. On one hand, Patriarch Kirill (Gundyaev) and the ROC hierarchy have fully assumed the role of the regime’s “ideological service staff,” embracing and sacralizing its imperial, anti-Western narrative. The church now provides the state with the crucial legitimacy it craves, sanctifying its actions with divine authority.

On the other hand, when connecting various elements — including the “prophetic” Basis of the Social Concept of the Russian Orthodox Church from 2000, written, incidentally, by Kirill-Gundyaev himself — it becomes evident that it is not the church serving the state, but the state that is increasingly serving the dictatorial power of the ROC (MP). And this is becoming more and more obvious with each passing day.

The “Prayer for Holy Rus’” became the first official church document to formally enshrine support for the war. It has become not only a propaganda tool but also a means of control — a litmus test to identify disloyal clergy. Its text perfectly complements the patriarch’s sermons about “washing away sins” with blood on the battlefield and about war as a defense against “gay parades.”

Indicators of a Corporate Mafia Structure

The system’s reaction to dissent over the “Prayer for Victory” most clearly reveals its transformation into a closed, authoritarian corporation operating under rules that resemble those of a totalitarian sect or a mafia clan. Let us examine its indications.

Rigid Hierarchy and Suppression of Dissent

It is well known that a totalitarian system cannot tolerate internal disagreement. Refusal to read the prayer — or even replacing the word “victory” with “peace” — is punished with demonstrative cruelty, treated as “perjury” and a breach of oath.

The list of repressed priests [22] is relatively short. Its small proportion (less than 1%) is not a sign of loyalty but rather proof of how effectively the repressive mechanism works. The mere threat of being "thrown out into the street" is so powerful that it crushes the will to resist among the vast majority.

Here is a very incomplete list of priests who have been repressed.

- Alexei Uminsky, archpriest — banned from ministry and later defrocked for refusing to read the "Prayer for Victory." [7]
- Ioann Koval, priest — defrocked for replacing the word "victory" with "peace" in the prayer. [8]
- Andrei Kudrin, priest — defrocked for reading a prayer for the reconciliation of nations instead of the official "Prayer for Victory." [9]
- Vladimir Korolev, priest [10] — dismissed as rector and removed from staff for refusing to collect funds for the needs of the "SMO." [11]
- Vadim Perminov, archpriest — banned from ministry for refusing to read the "Prayer for Victory." [12]
- Pyotr Ustinov, priest — suspended from service for refusing to read the prayer for war and for using the Russian language in liturgy. [13]
- Andrei Kordochkin, archpriest — banned from ministry over his antiwar stance. [14]
- Gleb Krivoshein, priest — fined for "discrediting" the army after signing an antiwar appeal. [15]
- Andrei Drugai, priest — banned from liturgical service for refusing to read the prayer for war; forced to leave the country. [16]
- Ioann Burdin, priest — fined for an antiwar sermon. [17]
- Athanasy (Bukin), hieromonk — banned from ministry and defrocked for refusing to be complicit in military aggression. [18]
- Pyotr Prokoptsov, priest — banned from ministry for refusing to bless military equipment. [19]
- Dionisy Korostelev, priest — suspended and arrested for commemorating Ukrainian soldiers. [20]
- Vitaly Motskus, priest — defrocked for condemning the war and criticizing the patriarch. [21]
- Vitaly Dauparas, priest — defrocked for condemning the war and criticizing the patriarch. [21]
- Georgy Ananyev, priest — defrocked for condemning the war and criticizing the patriarch. [21]

- Vladimir Selyavko, priest — defrocked for condemning the war and criticizing the patriarch. [21]
- Gintaras Sungaila, priest — defrocked for condemning the war and criticizing the patriarch. [21]

And others…

Archpriest Alexander Novopashin commented in the *Radonezh* media outlet on the banning of priest Vadim Perminov [12]. Perminov had served at the Church of the Nativity of John the Baptist in Kuibyshev, Novosibirsk Region, since 2000. He was defrocked for refusing to read the prayer for Holy Rus', which contains the words "for the victory of the Russian army." Let us recall that this prayer has been mandatory for all ROC priests since September 2022.

A Novosibirsk archpriest accused priests of betrayal and funding from Western sponsors.

July 6, 2024

Evgeny Dyatlov

A Novosibirsk archpriest accused priests of betrayal and funding from Western sponsors.

A Novosibirsk archpriest called anti-war priests "black sheep" and accused them of having ties to Western oligarchs.

Archpriest Alexander Novopashin spoke in the publication "Radonezh" regarding the suspension of Priest Vadim Perminov from ministry. He served at the Church of the Nativity of John the Baptist in Kuibyshev, Novosibirsk Oblast, since 2000. He was defrocked for refusing to recite the prayer for Holy Rus', which includes the words "for the victory of the Russian army." Priests must recite this prayer in all Russian Orthodox Church churches beginning in September 2022.

Archpriest Alexander Novopashin

Alexander Novopashin

"The archpriest believes that priests with anti-war stance actually receive money from Russian oligarchs. He cited the example of the organization "Peace Unto All," which supports priests with anti-war views. [23]

More of Novopashin's statements about Priest Perminov and the "Peace Unto All" project:

"Do you think he speaks out of ignorance? I don't think so. We once had a well-known intelligent and talented Moscow priest, who was one of the first to publicly refuse to perform the sacred prayer. But he refused, most likely,

*because he had planned everything in advance. After being defrocked, he was immediately rewarded [materially] by a former Russian oligarch living abroad and engaged in active subversive activity against Russia. Later, he joined the schismatics and now serves abroad in one of their churches. Why not follow his example? — **perhaps that's exactly what Vadim P. thought.** And 'good thought' was quickly followed by action. The suspended clergyman was not mistaken. He was immediately promised financial support — from abroad, of course. There's an organization created after the start of the Special Military Operation, Peace Unto All, that provides 'assistance to antiwar clergy.'*

They're the ones who promise funding to priests who urge their congregations to oppose the state and speak out against the Special Military Operation. Some of them may hope that after such a defiant act, they'll even be invited abroad. But that's unlikely — such people aren't particularly needed there. And no one will 'feed' them for long; they'll just get a one-time allowance. But to trumpet all over the world that there are such 'fighters against the bloody regime' and victims of the ruling bishop for their principles, honesty, and courage — that's their direct duty. Because it's good bait — what if more 'peace-making warriors' come forward? Indeed, excellent advertising: do the same, don't be afraid, you won't be left without a piece of bread, we'll take care of that!" [24]

Vadim Perminov, former archpriest of the Kainsk Diocese, city of Kuybyshev, Novosibirsk Region.

Corporate Loyalty and Authoritarianism

A totalitarian structure always operates on the principle of protecting the "family" (*la famiglia*). Loyalty to the hierarchy and to the head of the corporation is placed immeasurably above the Gospel truth, pastoral conscience, and canonical law.

Decisions are made behind closed doors, and church courts — which merely rubber-stamp predetermined outcomes — have turned into closed tribunals. This creates an atmosphere of fear and mutual cover-up within the church environment, encouraging not spiritual virtues but unprincipledness and servility.

The "Prayer for Holy Rus'" is neither an unfortunate mistake nor a poorly worded statement. It is the logical and tragic outcome of a long process of degradation within the Russian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate (ROC MP), of its deliberate rejection of its prophetic mission in favor of consolidating the power of church patriarchs — or rather, the total power of representatives of global anticultism.

In Conclusion

When the church merges with an authoritarian state, taking on the characteristics of a closed corporation, its doctrine is systematically adapted to justify that alliance. When an organization is governed by the laws of totalitarianism — blind obedience to the leader (the patriarch), brutal suppression of dissent and mutual cover-up — it inevitably leads to a distortion of doctrine. One does not work without the other..

By sanctioning the "Prayer for Victory" and turning it into a tool of repression, the leadership of the ROC (MP) has demonstrated that its chief priority has become not the preaching of Christ, who calls for universal love and who was crucified on the cross, but the strengthening of its own mafia-like interests and the defense of the political system. This is a symptom of the deepest

spiritual and institutional crisis, the consequences of which modern Russian Orthodoxy has yet to fully grasp.

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